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PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1998-1999

First report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions*

PART VI. HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS

VI.1. The Secretary-General's estimate for 1998-1999 for part VI, Human rights and humanitarian affairs, of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 amounts to $138,646,400, comprising $46,448,500 for section 22, Human rights; $50,568,700 for section 23, Protection of and assistance to refugees; $19,375,000 for section 24, Palestine refugees; and $22,254,200 for section 25, Humanitarian assistance.

Section 22. Human rights

VI.2. The Advisory Committee notes from paragraph 22.3 that the proposed programme budget for section 22 was prepared following a restructuring of the programme on human rights and a reorganization of the Centre for Human Rights. The Advisory Committee also notes that the programme will be implemented through a new management structure put in place in 1996. However, it is not clear to the Committee whether claims of greater efficiency can be substantiated, and it is also difficult to compare the estimates unit-by-unit with the 1996-1997 programme budget owing to the changes in the structure of the Secretariat. In this connection, the Committee recalls that the General Assembly, when adopting the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001,[1] decided in its resolution 51/219

* The present document contains part VI of chapter II of the first report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999. Chapter I has been issued as Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 7 (A/52/7). The complete first report will be issued as Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 7 (A/52/7/Rev.1).

of 18 December 1996 to adopt programme 19, Human rights, without prejudice to consideration by the General Assembly of the ongoing process of restructuring the Centre for Human Rights.

VI.3. The Advisory Committee was provided with information on steps being taken to implement recommendations contained in the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services of 26 April 1995 (A/49/892).

VI.4. The Advisory Committee notes from table 22.2 that for 1998-1999 the amount of $46,448,500 is proposed under the regular budget. This represents a decrease of $1,552,100 as compared to appropriations of $48,000,600 for 1996-1997. As indicated in the same table, for 1998-1999, the amount of $48,879,400 is expected under extrabudgetary resources. This represents an increase of $4,005,400 as compared to estimates of $44,874,000 for 1996-1997.

VI.5. With regard to extrabudgetary resources, it is the view of the Advisory Committee that steps should be taken to ensure that trust funds are audited more extensively, especially the large ones. It is the opinion of the Committee that there is also a need to streamline reporting to donors.

VI.6. As indicated in table 22.3, the total number of regular budget posts proposed for the biennium 1998-1999 is 143, representing a decrease of 16 regular budget posts as compared with the total of 159 posts (142 established and 17 temporary) for the biennium 1996-1997. The total number of extrabudgetary posts proposed for the biennium 1998-1999 is 52, representing a decrease of 4 posts as compared with the total of 48 posts for the biennium 1996-1997. The Advisory Committee was informed that all of the 16 regular budget posts proposed to be decreased were vacant as of 1 May 1997. The Committee notes that the Secretary-General has proposed converting 14 temporary posts to established posts and making a reduction of 16 posts (11 Professional and 5 General Service), including 3 temporary posts (1 P-4, 1 P-3 and 1 General Service). However, the reasons for the reduction have not been explained; it is therefore not clear whether the reduction is only for the reason that the posts are vacant or whether the reduction can be justified substantively. The Committee was also informed that the classification and job descriptions of all posts would be completed by the end of July 1997. The Committee welcomes the low ratio of Professional to General Service staff.

VI.7. The Advisory Committee was informed that the number of established posts for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has been increased from 13 for 1996-1997 to 15 for 1998-1999 (1 Under-Secretary-General, 1 Assistant Secretary-General, 4 P-5, 1 P-4 and 8 General Service). The Committee also notes that the increase is due to the expansion of the functions under executive direction and management. However, in the opinion of the Committee, care should be taken not to compromise the ability of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to provide leadership. The Committee recommends that steps be taken to avoid duplication of functions carried out in the field.

VI.8. With regard to subprogramme 1, Right to development, research and analysis, the Advisory Committee is of the opinion that the Secretary-General should have explained more clearly how the provisions of paragraphs 38 and 39 of General Assembly resolution 50/214 of 23 December 1995 are being implemented. In this connection, the Committee points out that in the report of the Secretary-General issued in response to paragraphs 38 and 39 of resolution 50/214, it is stated that an addendum to the report would be issued containing

an analysis of resources distribution (A/C.5/50/71, para. 20). That addendum has not been compiled.

VI.9. In the opinion of the Advisory Committee, costs related to the activities of the High Commissioner and the Centre in peacekeeping operations need to be clearly identified in each case. It is also the view of the Committee that there is need to clarify the relationship of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Centre to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Political Affairs and other offices of the Secretariat involved in human rights activities so as to define more clearly the lead role of the High Commissioner and the Centre regarding human rights activities related to peacekeeping operations, special measures and human rights offices in the field. The Committee points out that currently there are six field offices: Abkhazia, Georgia; Burundi; Cambodia; Colombia; Rwanda; and the territory of the former Yugoslavia. The Committee calls for greater cooperation between the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Office of the High Commissioner in areas of mutual concern.

VI.10. With regard to the New York Liaison Office posts (1 D-1, 2 P-4, 1 P-3 and 3 General Service), the Advisory Committee recommends that, in view of the increasing use of technologies such as e-mail and facsimile transmission and in light of the budgetary constraints, the size of this Office be reviewed. The substantive support that is provided by this Office also should be taken into account (see chap. I, paras. 115 and 116).

VI.11. In connection with meetings and publications, the Advisory Committee points out that the provision of data on outputs related to meetings and publications would have been useful. Upon inquiry, the Committee was informed that for 1998-1999, the Secretary-General estimated a total of 1,488 meetings of the intergovernmental organs. The Committee points out that the human rights programme has given rise to a complex intergovernmental machinery. It is the view of the Committee that the time has come for the Commission to come up with a more pragmatic meeting programme for the various subcommissions, committees and other groups and that consideration should be given to holding some meetings every other year instead of annually.

VI.12. In connection with the number of reports to be issued in 1998-1999, the Advisory Committee was informed that the proposed programme budget is based on an estimate of 311 human rights reports, 52 for the General Assembly, 50 for both the General Assembly and the Commission, 2 for the Economic and Social Council, 109 for the Commission on Human Rights, 15 for the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and 83 others. It is the view of the Committee that the number of documents involved and the setting of unrealistic deadlines for completion could adversely affect the efficiency of the legislative process. In this connection, the Committee was informed that with regard to reports prepared by Special Rapporteurs, it was impossible to apply guidelines relating to size and number of reports. Nevertheless, the Committee believes that there is need for review in this area, which should be carried out before the submission of the programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001.

VI.13. As regards the publication programme of the Centre, the Advisory Committee recalls paragraph VI.10 of its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997,[2] in which the Committee recommended that the Centre re-examine, as a matter of priority, its publications programme for the purpose of ensuring that all publications fulfil an identifiable need and are produced in a cost-effective manner. The Committee notes that this review has not been carried out.

Report of the Secretary-General on United Nations reform: measures and proposals (A/52/303)

The above report was issued subsequent to the Advisory Committee's consideration of its draft report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999.

As shown in table 22.1 of the report, the financial consequences of the Secretary-General's actions and recommendations relating to section 22 would be a reduction of $1,023,900, from $47,162,600 to $46,138,700, and, as shown in table 22.2, there would be a reduction of two General Service posts.

At the time of the Advisory Committee's consideration of its draft report, a decision still had not been reached on how the Secretary-General's reform proposals would be dealt with in the General Assembly. The Committee will therefore revert to consideration of document A/52/303 in due course.

Section 23. Protection of and assistance to refugees

VI.14. As indicated in paragraph 23.13, in accordance with article 20 of the statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), no expenditure other than administrative expenditure relating to the functioning of the Office of the High Commissioner is borne by the budget of the United Nations and all other activities of the High Commissioner are financed by voluntary contributions. As indicated in table 23.2, the total number of regular posts proposed for the biennium 1998-1999 is 220 (89 Professional posts and 131 General Service), representing a decrease of 24 General Service posts from 244 posts for the biennium 1996-1997. Of the 24 General Service posts to be abolished, 16 are vacant. The Advisory Committee was informed that five Professional posts are also vacant.

VI.15. The Advisory Committee notes from paragraph 23.14 that the funding of UNHCR from the regular budget may be reviewed in the future to determine whether other budgetary arrangements such as a lump sum grant would be administratively more effective. It is the view of the Committee that in future, whatever arrangement is adopted, the regular budget should continue to fund conference servicing of the Executive Committee.

VI.16. In this connection, the Advisory Committee notes that contributions from the regular budget of the United Nations have decreased in recent years and now account for approximately 2 per cent of UNHCR resources. The regular budget contribution to UNHCR was reduced from $51,561,300 in 1994-1995 to $50,139,100 in 1996-1997 to cover 244 administrative support posts at UNHCR headquarters. The proposed contribution from the regular budget for 1998-1999 is $50,568,700 to cover the costs of 220 administrative support posts ($47,335,600), a provision for general temporary assistance ($2,008,600) and a partial contribution towards the rent and maintenance and other charges for the UNHCR headquarters building.[3]

VI.17. Upon inquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed during its consideration of the report on the overview of UNHCR activities financed from voluntary funds, 1996-1998,[4] that, in the context of implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/214, UNHCR was requested to make arrangements to save

approximately $1.4 million in its regular budget posts. This was done by UNHCR by implementing a vacancy rate of 10 per cent, or 24 posts, in 1996-1997. The Committee was informed that as the functions of these posts could not be dispensed with, UNHCR funded the cost of the posts from its voluntary contributions. In the past, the Committee has discouraged the transfer of extrabudgetary posts to the regular budget unless the functions relate to activities that should be funded from the regular budget. In this instance, the Committee questions the rationale for transferring regular budget funding to extrabudgetary funding. Furthermore, such transfers appear more questionable now, when UNHCR is in the process of reducing posts, particularly at headquarters, owing to, inter alia, the steady decline of extrabudgetary resources.

Section 24. Palestine refugees

VI.18. The Advisory Committee recalls General Assembly resolution 3331 B (XXIX) of 17 December 1974, in which the General Assembly decided that the expenses for salaries of international staff in the service of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East which would otherwise be a charge on voluntary contributions should with effect from 1 January 1975 be financed by the regular budget of the United Nations for the duration of the Agency's mandate.

VI.19. The Advisory Committee notes from table 24.2 that for 1998-1999 the amount of $19,375,000 is proposed under the regular budget and the amount of $843,900,000 is expected under extrabudgetary resources.

VI.20. As indicated in table 24.3, the total number of regular budget posts for the biennium 1998-1999 is 84, representing a decrease of 8 (1 P-5, 1 P-4, 5 P-3 and 1 General Service) regular budget posts as compared with the total of 92 posts for the biennium 1996-1997. As indicated in table 24.3, the total number of extrabudgetary posts proposed for the biennium 1998-1999 is 60, representing a decrease of 19 extrabudgetary posts as compared with the total of 79 posts for the biennium 1996-1997. Of the eight regular budget posts proposed to be abolished, the Advisory Committee was informed that three posts were vacant as of 27 May 1997. The reduction in posts has not been explained in the programme budget, nor has the Committee been given sufficient information to relate the proposal to the requirements of the programme.

VI.21. In connection with extrabudgetary posts, the Advisory Committee recalls that for the biennium 1996-1997 it had recommended that a report be submitted to it on how the separation entitlements of staff who are paid from extrabudgetary resources are determined. The Committee points out that this report has not yet been submitted.

Section 25. Humanitarian assistance

VI.22. The Advisory Committee notes from paragraph 25.8 of the proposed programme budget that the distribution of the proposed resources reflects the reorganization of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs carried out on the basis of the findings of the management review undertaken in 1996. The Committee also notes that as a result of the reorganization four additional posts at the P-5 level are proposed to be established under the regular budget, to be offset by the abolition of four General Service posts.

VI.23. The Advisory Committee notes from table 25.1 that the extrabudgetary resources are estimated at $204,438,100 for 1998-1999 as compared to $190,189,300 for 1996-1997. The Committee was informed that an audit of trust funds was carried out in March 1997. Upon inquiry, the Advisory Committee was also informed that seven staff members (3 in New York and 4 in Geneva) are responsible for the management of the trust funds.

VI.24. As indicated in table 25.3, the total number of regular budget posts proposed for the biennium 1998-1999 is 75, which is the same as the number of regular budget posts in 1996-1997. As indicated in table 25.3, the total number of extrabudgetary posts for the biennium 1998-1999 is 255, representing a decrease of 37 extrabudgetary posts as compared with the total of 292 posts for the biennium 1996-1997.

VI.25. The Advisory Committee is concerned with the lack of capacity to monitor and control trust funds. The Committee is also not satisfied with the information regarding a computerized information system on trust funds. In view of the workload involved in preparing the work plan for trust funds and the workload related to preparing reports to donors, the Committee believes that there is an urgent need to establish a computerized system to manage the large number of trust funds.

VI.26. With regard to rates charged to donors, the Advisory Committee was informed that the rate of 13 per cent was applied to all trust funds except for the support programme, where, owing to the fact that the transfer mechanism does not involve much additional work, the rates range between 3 to 13 per cent. In this connection, it is the view of the Committee that guidelines should be established and criteria set for funds that should be exempt and those which are to be charged the full rate.

VI.27. Information on gratis personnel is provided in footnote a to table 25.3. The Advisory Committee's views on gratis personnel have been indicated in its report on the subject (A/51/813). The Committee recalls the provision of General Assembly resolution 51/243 of 15 September 1997, by which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to phase out expeditiously type II gratis personnel, as well as Action 3 of the Secretary-General's measures and proposals for reform contained in his report on renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform (A/51/950), in which it is stated that a plan will be developed to phase out the use of gratis personnel in the Secretariat at the earliest possible date.

VI.28. With regard to the Lessons Learned Unit, the Advisory Committee was informed that this function is assigned two posts. In this connection, the Committee notes from table 25.3 that the Department has 57 personnel who serve as members of United Nations disaster assessment and coordination teams in the field to address disasters and humanitarian emergencies. The Committee was informed that these personnel have a stand-by status and are deployed on location as required.

VI.29. The Advisory Committee notes from paragraph 25.15 that as a result of the reorganization, two D-1 posts (1 in New York and 1 in Geneva) are to be redeployed from executive direction and management to the programme of activities.

VI.30. The Advisory Committee also notes from table 25.19 that the total number of posts for the Executive Office has been reduced from 31 to 26. However, no reasons have been given for the reduction.

VI.31. As indicated in paragraph 25.51, the Department will continue to maintain its responsibility for the Relief Logistics Centre at Pisa, Italy, which is currently funded entirely from extrabudgetary resources. The Advisory Committee was informed that this function was being reviewed and that the facility may be relocated. It is the view of the Committee that it might be desirable for the Department to move out of the management of this function and instead concentrate on the coordination of mobilization of resources and provision of information; the Secretary-General should explore with other agencies such as UNHCR and WFP the possibility of common use of this facility.

Report of the Secretary-General on United Nations reform: measures and proposals (A/52/303)

The above report was issued subsequent to the Advisory Committee's consideration of its draft report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999.

As shown in table 25.1 of the report, the financial consequences of the Secretary-General's actions and recommendations relating to section 25 would be a reduction of $3,483,900, from $21,885,000 to $18,401,100, and, as shown in table 25.2 of the report, there would be a reduction of 25 posts (16 Professional and 9 General Service).

At the time of the Advisory Committee's consideration of its draft report, a decision still had not been reached on how the Secretary-General's reform proposals would be dealt with in the General Assembly. The Advisory Committee will therefore revert to consideration of document A/52/303 in due course.

Notes

[1] Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 6 and corrigendum (A/51/6/Rev.1 and Rev.1/Corr.1).

[2] Ibid., Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 7 and corrigendum (A/50/7 and Corr.1).

[3] See A/AC.96/884, para. 63.

[4] A/AC.96/884.